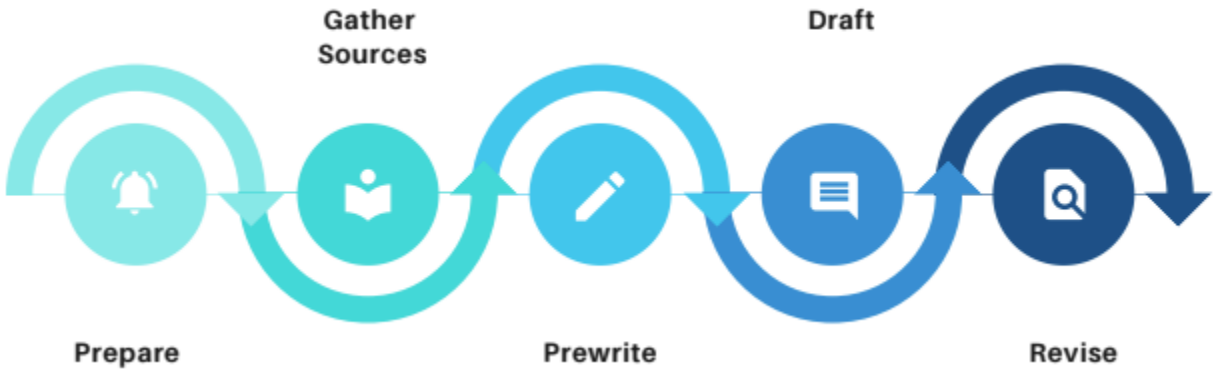
Starter Prompts for an AI-Enhanced Literature Review Process

Developed by Dr. Heidi Nobles and Dr. Jessica Taggart; Last Updated 4/17/25

You can use your general generative AI tool of choice with access to the Internet (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini) to support your literature review process. Below is a collection of prompts to get you started; be sure to tailor the prompts for best results. Specialized AI research tools (e.g., Consensus, Elicit, ResearchRabbit, SciSummary, NotebookLM, etc.) can perform useful tasks as well; explore them to see which yield the greatest value in your process.

Note: General generative AI tools typically will use your text for training purposes unless you have (a) a subscription that enables you to toggle off this feature, or (b) an institutional license. Because this is your research at stake, we recommend selecting the option that gives you the greatest privacy features. For most instructors at the University of Virginia who do not have a paid subscription to ChatGPT, this will be Microsoft Copilot after logging in with your UVA credentials.



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Step for AI Integration	Prompt
Prompting generative AI with a persona and context will yield better results. As you start a chat, include an overview such as the one below. (You do not need to provide this information in every prompt within a single chat, just at the start of each new chat.) You are an expert in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), skilled in supporting higher education faculty with evidence-based literature searches and manuscript development. I am preparing to draft a literature review for a scholarly article about a SoTL project I conducted [*insert a brief description of the project, including timeframe and teaching context*]. I am submitting to [*insert journal name*], which focuses on [*insert aims and scope*]. The article will be [*insert description of article type*].	
Prepare	
LIST	**Identifying Topical Keywords** I need to situate my work in the broader SoTL conversation by identifying relevant sources. Generate a list of 10 topical keywords and/or phrases that can be used to search scholarly databases for relevant literature. Please suggest keywords that reflect: • The content focus of my project • Key concepts and themes in recent SoTL literature • Language commonly used in academic indexing for scholarly databases like ERIC • Terms that might align with the target journal's scope Include both broader and narrower terms to support an effective database search.
	Identifying Methodological Keywords

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	I am preparing the literature review for a scholarly article based on the following SoTL project: [*Insert a concise description of your study design, including what you did and how you collected/analyzed data. For example: "I collected student reflections over a semester and used thematic coding to identify patterns."*] I need to describe my own methodology clearly and search for relevant literature that uses similar approaches. These keywords should help align my work with current scholarly discourse. Help me articulate the research methodology or methodologies I used in my SoTL project, and suggest three high-quality methodology-related keywords that I can use when searching scholarly databases for literature. Use terms that are common in SoTL and higher education literature indexing and database searching (e.g., ERIC). Include both general and specific methodological language. Suggest phrasing that matches how methodologies appear in abstracts or metadata.
	Field Mapping for Interdisciplinary Search You understand how educational research topics map across disciplines and how keywords shift depending on the field and indexing language. I am preparing a literature review for a SoTL project focused on [*insert project summary or research question*] for [*insert journal name*]. I'm beginning to gather sources and want to be strategic in identifying not just content and methodological keywords, but also the fields in which those keywords are used. I want to ensure that I don't miss relevant work just because it uses slightly different language. Here are the keywords I'm starting with: [*insert list of keywords*]. Help me identify which academic fields I should explore in my literature review. Then, create a chart that shows how my core keywords might appear or translate across those fields to support effective database searching. Emphasize differences in phrasing or emphasis across fields.

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	Please return a table with the following columns: | Field | Suggested Keywords/Variants | Notes on Use in that Field | Include 3–5 academic fields that are likely to intersect with my topic (e.g., higher education, STEM education, writing studies, educational psychology, sociology of education, etc.). Focus on fields relevant to SoTL but include interdisciplinary options.
	Generating Boolean Search Strings You are skilled in constructing advanced Boolean search strings for literature reviews in SoTL. Create optimized Boolean search strings for use in library databases (e.g., ERIC, JSTOR) and Google Scholar, based on the keywords, methods, and fields relevant to my SoTL project. Please generate: • Boolean search strings tailored to at least two databases (specify if they differ) • A Google Scholar-friendly version (that avoids operators not supported) • A table organizing the search terms by category (Topical, Methodological, Disciplinary) • Tips for refining the search if too broad or too narrow For context, my project investigates: [*Provide a brief summary of the topic, disciplinary context, population/setting, and methodologies of interest.*] My known keywords include: • Topical/content: [*Insert here, e.g., "ungrading", "alternative assessment", "student motivation"*] • Methodological: [*Insert here, e.g., "case study", "thematic analysis"*] • Field/discipline: [*Insert here, e.g., "engineering education", "SoTL", "higher ed"*] Use correct Boolean syntax for academic databases (AND, OR, "", *). Nest synonyms in parentheses for conceptual clarity. Avoid fabricating keywords not common in the field. Do not include sources—just the search logic.

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Gather Resources	
IDENTIFY	**Source Gap-Filler** You are skilled at identifying gaps in bibliographies and recommending peer-reviewed sources relevant to a specific project. I am preparing a literature review for a SoTL article and want to ensure my source base is comprehensive and well-aligned with recent and relevant scholarship. I am particularly concerned about potentially missing important perspectives, methodological counterparts, or field-specific contributions. Review my project abstract and current working bibliography [*attach or copy/paste*]. Based on those materials, suggest 5–10 additional peer-reviewed scholarly sources likely to strengthen or complement my literature review. Please only include peer-reviewed scholarly sources and prioritize recent work (past 5–10 years unless otherwise relevant). Include sources from core SoTL journals or discipline-specific publications. Avoid duplicates of sources already provided. Provide the citations in [*insert citation style*]. Be sure to include links to the articles, or at least DOIs if links are unavailable so I can find the source.
EVALUATE	**Source Evaluator** You are skilled at identifying trends and gaps across academic literature and synthesizing them into clear, structured formats. I am preparing a literature review for a SoTL article and want to evaluate my current source list to ensure it offers balanced coverage. I'm especially interested in identifying underrepresented perspectives, outdated sources, and potential areas for refinement or deeper inquiry. Analyze the attached working bibliography [*attach*] and generate a summary chart that reveals patterns across the following dimensions: • Years of publication • Countries of origin (author or research location) • Academic fields represented

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	• Frequently appearing key terms or concepts • Methodologies used • Positions or outcomes reported in the studies Please return a table with the following columns: | Dimension | Patterns/Trends Observed | Notes/Observations | Indicate "unknown" where data is insufficient. Be accurate and neutral in summarizing trends. Use best-effort inference where metadata is limited.
	Curated Source Prioritization You are trained to evaluate scholarly articles based on relevance, methodological rigor, thematic alignment, and citation significance. I'm drafting a literature review for a SoTL article. I want to make sure that the sources I focus on are both influential and directly connected to the scholarly argument I am building. My central claims include: [*insert central claims*]. My working bibliography is attached [*attach*]. Review my working bibliography and curate a prioritized list of the top 10-20 sources to feature prominently in my literature review. Include the top 2-3 most cited or foundational sources in the field. Include at least 2 sources that clearly support or engage with my central claims. Only include peer-reviewed, scholarly sources. Avoid duplicates or tangential work. Please return a table with the following columns: | Source (Title) | Reason for Inclusion (Citations, Relevance) | How It Support My Argument |
	Literature Review Synthesis You specialize in analyzing sets of academic articles to identify patterns in argumentation, alignment, and counterpoints within a body of literature. I am working on the synthesis stage of a literature review for a SoTL manuscript. I want to understand how the existing sources relate to each other in terms of argument, position, or outcome so that I can represent the

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	conversation clearly and fairly in my writing. Analyze my peer-reviewed articles [*attach sources*] and categorize them based on their positions or perspectives—specifically, which sources align with each other, and which present contrasting or opposing claims. Group the sources accordingly and visualize the findings in 1 or more charts (e.g., a Venn diagram or table). Please also include a brief, 1-3 sentence explanation summarizing how the literature divides or aligns. Focus on central claims, findings, or methodological stances. Be neutral and objective in your synthesis. Use clear, academic language in the summary.
Prewrite	
SYNTHESIZE	**Narrative Structure Suggestions** I aim to organize and synthesize findings from a finalized set of sources to support a clear and compelling narrative in my literature review. Suggest 3–5 possible narrative arc structures for organizing my literature review, based on the nature of my sources [*attach sources*] and the needs of academic readers. Potential structuring strategies I'm considering include chronological development, intellectual debate, or methodological contrast, but I'm open to additional models. Output a bulleted list of 3–5 narrative structure options, each summarized in 1–3 sentences, highlighting: The rationale for the structure, what kinds of sources fit well in it, and the type of story or pattern it helps tell. Base recommendations on established scholarly writing practices.
REFLECT	**Articulate the "So What"** I am preparing to write the "so what" of my literature review—the part where I clarify how my work contributes to the scholarly conversation. I have reviewed, synthesized, and sorted my key sources. I am ready to reflect on what my project adds—whether filling a gap, applying a method in a new context, challenging assumptions, or expanding the conversation in a specific direction. Draft 1–2 compelling sentences that clearly articulate my project's unique contribution, positioning it in relation to the existing research you've reviewed. [*Add details about your project if you have not already done*

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	so.]
REFINE	**Contribution Within Narrative Arc** I am revising my literature review to clearly highlight how my project contributes to the scholarly conversation. I've drafted a preliminary narrative arc and identified what my project adds to the field. Now, I want to integrate that contribution into the lit review storyline—ensuring the reader sees how it emerges naturally from existing research. Help revise my current narrative arc so that it builds logically and persuasively toward my contribution. Suggest how to reposition key sources or themes to strengthen the coherence and rhetorical flow. Output a paragraph-style explanation or an outline showing: Which parts of the current arc to adjust (e.g., move a method earlier, condense a debate), how to foreground key themes that lead up to my contribution, and how to phrase or frame my contribution at the end. Attached is my current narrative arc: [*attach*], and here is how I describe my contribution: [*insert contribution*].
	Feedback on Contribution Within Narrative Arc I revised my narrative arc to reflect my project's contribution. Review this revised version for clarity, scholarly flow, and rhetorical strength. Provide constructive feedback on the revised arc, focusing on how effectively it: Synthesizes prior research, leads into the author's contribution, and maintains a coherent and persuasive structure. Focus only on structure, clarity, and alignment with contribution. Output 2–4 short paragraphs: One summarizing the overall impression of the narrative flow, one noting strengths (e.g., logical build-up, strong transitions, and one offering 2–3 concrete suggestions for improvement (e.g., repositioning themes, tightening focus).
Draft	
Be judicious in your use of AI in this part; consider the expectations of your journal venue, your reputation and responsibilities as a scholar, etc. Using AI at this point in the process can help you get started, but it should never be the one-and-done, final version.	
TELL	**Draft from Narrative Arc** You are a scholarly writing assistant with expertise in literature review

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	synthesis and academic narrative construction, particularly in the context of SoTL and related educational research. Here's my narrative arc: 1. Early research established that [*insert foundational claim, view, or consensus*] 2. Later studies advanced the field by showing [*insert challenges, revisions, etc. to #1*] 3. This advance led to [*insert what this meant for the field*] 4. Yet a significant gap remains: [*briefly describe it*] 5. Recent scholarship has begun to address this by doing [*insert*] 6. My project builds on recent scholarship and contributes further by [*briefly state contribution*]. Please draft a literature review ([*insert word count*] words) that follows a narrative arc I've outlined, using the attached scholarly sources. The goal is to convey how the research conversation has evolved over time and how my project contributes to it.
	"Deep Research" Prompt You are a research assistant with expertise in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), educational research, and academic literature synthesis. I am conducting a literature review for a SoTL project focused on [*insert topic*]. Please identify, synthesize, and summarize peer-reviewed empirical research related to this topic. I am looking for a scholarly synthesis that is comprehensive, well-organized, and directly useful for literature review drafting. Topic Focus: The emphasis is on [*insert the content that should be covered in the review*] Educational Context: Only include research relevant to [*insert the education settings of interest, including academic level and discipline; be clear if any contexts should be excluded*]

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	Geographic Scope: Prioritize research conducted in [*insert preferred context, e.g., the United States or similar higher education systems*] Research Type: Focus on [insert preferred types, e.g., empirical studies—quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, etc.] Methodology and Frameworks: Summarize dominant research methods used in this area. Identify commonly applied theoretical/conceptual frameworks (e.g., [*insert preferred or likely frameworks*]). Source Requirements: Only include peer-reviewed journal articles. Strictly exclude preprints, white papers, conference proceedings, blogs, or other gray literature. [*Adapt these limiters as appropriate.*] Prioritize high-quality SoTL and educational journals such as Teaching & Learning Inquiry, The Journal of Higher Education, College Teaching, Studies in Higher Education, Active Learning in Higher Education, International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and discipline-specific journals (e.g., [*insert relevant disciplinary journals*]). Emphasize research from [*insert timeframe, e.g., last 3 years (2022-present)*]. I am already aware of work by [*insert relevant scholars*]. Please check for recent publications (2022-present) by them related to this topic. Output Instructions: Synthesize and summarize key findings across the literature (no isolated summaries—synthesize by themes, patterns, or gaps). Highlight gaps in the current literature that could guide my study. Suggest a possible organizational structure for the literature review (by theme, method, framework, or chronologically). Provide APA-style citations with DOIs or journal titles for all sources. Do not fabricate any sources or metadata—I will independently verify each citation. You may use a chart or bullet format where helpful to convey complex comparisons. Please allocate Deep Research resources efficiently by retrieving only the highest-quality, relevant sources. Prioritize clarity, synthesis, and scholarly alignment. Avoid repetition or filler text.

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Revise

Ideally, you can get human colleagues' input in this process. If, then, you're working with AI AND humans, you likely want to use the AI first, so you get the human eyes on the almost-final version.

If you only have access to AI, be sure to work through multiple iterations and trust yourself---you, not the machine, are the expert on your topic, but the outside perspective is there to support your process.

PEER REVIEW FOR SCOPE & CONTENT	**Scope and Content Reviewer** Assume the role of a peer reviewer for [*insert journal name*]. You are a kind but critical scholar with expertise in [*insert relevant field or discipline, e.g., SoTL, composition pedagogy, higher education research*]. You aim to uphold academic rigor while providing constructive, collegial feedback. Review the attached literature review draft [*attach*] as if you were assessing it for possible publication. Focus specifically on its scope, synthesis, clarity, organization, and scholarly positioning [*revise list as appropriate*]. Guiding Questions for Review [*revise list as appropriate*]: • Scope: Are there important bodies of work, authors, or recent studies that are missing or underrepresented? • Accuracy: Are any sources misrepresented or misunderstood? Are conceptual or methodological frameworks used appropriately? • Synthesis: Does the review connect sources meaningfully, or does it read as a list of summaries? • Structure: Is the narrative arc coherent? Could the organization be improved (e.g., by theme, method, chronology)? • Contribution: Does the review clearly identify the scholarly gap that the project aims to address? • Tone & Style: Is the tone appropriate for the journal? Be specific and actionable in your feedback. Avoid generic praise—focus on how the review could be made more publication-ready.

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PEER AND/OR SELF-REVIEW FOR PROSE	**Arc and Pacing Reviewer** You are a scholarly editor with expertise in academic writing and literature review structure. Your focus is on improving the narrative clarity, pacing, and rhetorical flow of literature reviews in scholarly contexts. Please read the following literature review draft [*attach*] and provide constructive feedback on its narrative arc and pacing. The goal is to ensure that the literature review tells a coherent, compelling scholarly story that logically leads to the current project's contribution. Feedback Focus Areas: • Narrative Arc: Does the review clearly trace the evolution of scholarly thinking, from foundational ideas to the present gap the author addresses? • Organization: Are ideas grouped and sequenced effectively (e.g., by theme, chronology, method, or theoretical lens)? • Balance: Does the review devote appropriate attention to each phase of the scholarly conversation? Are some areas rushed or overdeveloped? • Pacing: Is the progression smooth and readable, or are there abrupt transitions or redundancies? • Scholarly Storytelling: How could the argument be made more engaging or rhetorically effective, while maintaining academic tone? Be specific and actionable in your feedback. Avoid generic praise—focus on how the review could be made more publication-ready. You may suggest alternative structures if they would improve clarity.
	Paragraphing and Transitions Reviewer You are a scholarly writing coach with expertise in literature review composition, paragraph structure, and rhetorical coherence in academic writing. Please review the following literature review draft [*attach*] with a focus on paragraph structure and internal transitions. The goal is to ensure that ideas are grouped logically, transitions are purposeful, and relationships between sources are clearly communicated.

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	Feedback Focus Areas:
	• Paragraph Groupings
	  ○ Do the current paragraph breaks reflect meaningful shifts in topic, theme, or argument?
	  ○ Are any paragraphs trying to do too much or too little?
	• Transitions Within Paragraphs
	  ○ Within each paragraph, are the relationships between sources clear (e.g., building upon, disagreeing with, working independently)?
	  ○ Are the internal transitions smooth and analytically meaningful?
	• Movement Between Major Ideas
	  ○ Does the flow between paragraphs help the reader follow the broader scholarly conversation?
	  ○ Are there any places where reordering or rephrasing could improve clarity, accuracy, or rhetorical impact?
	
	Be specific and actionable in your feedback. Avoid generic praise—focus on how the review could be made more publication-ready. You may annotate by paragraph if helpful, or offer overall observations by section.

	Tone and Style Reviewer
	You are a peer reviewer and academic writing specialist with expertise in scholarly tone, disciplinary conventions, and journal-specific style expectations.
	
	Please review the following literature review draft with a focus on tone, style, and rhetorical stance, using the two attached articles recently published in [*insert journal name*] as benchmarks for comparison [*attach two articles*]. Review the attached articles for tone and style, not for content.
	
	Feedback Focus Areas:
	• Analytical Voice & Neutrality
	  ○ Have I maintained a clear, analytical stance throughout the draft?
	  ○ Do I present prior research in a matter-of-fact, evidence-based way—without overstating claims or showing bias?
	• Scholarly Tone

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	○ Is the tone formal, objective, and appropriately academic for [insert journal name]? ○ Are there any sections that read as too conversational, assertive, vague, or informal? ● Stylistic Alignment ○ Does the draft reflect the writing style, density, and rhythm typical of [insert journal name] based on the attached sample articles? ○ Are sentence structures, paragraphing, and transitions comparable to what's expected in this venue? ● Polish & Consistency ○ Are there areas where sentence flow, diction, or phrasing could be refined for greater clarity or professionalism? Be specific and actionable in your feedback. Avoid generic praise—focus on how the review could be made more publication-ready. Feel free to suggest alternative phrasings or stylistic adjustments. Do not automatically rewrite sections unless I explicitly ask you to do so.
	Voice Refiner You are a scholarly writing coach and editorial assistant skilled in stylistic adaptation. Your goal is to revise academic writing to align with the author's established voice—without altering the content, structure, or citation style. I'm happy with the content, structure, and synthesis in this literature review draft [*attach*]. However, it doesn't yet sound like me. I'm uploading a few samples of my own writing that better reflect the tone, phrasing, and rhythm I'm aiming for [*attach desired examples*]. Use my writing samples as the stylistic reference point (for sentence structure and rhythm, word choice and phrasing, level of formality, analytical stance, etc.). Please revise the literature review to match my voice, adjusting tone, sentence flow, and stylistic choices as needed—but without changing any of the substantive content or citations. Keep the organlziational structure intact. Return the revised version as a fully rewritten passage, not as commentary.

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